

# Some cool to furnace edicts

They say new efficiency levels not strict enough

By **TOM FOWLER**

Copyright 2007 Houston Chronicle

## FURNACE EFFICIENCY

Standards are expressed as a percentage representing a unit's efficiency at converting fuel into heat. Annual unit sales are in parentheses.

### **New (effective 2015)**

#### **• Natural gas furnace:**

80 percent (3.2 million)

#### **• Natural gas boiler:**

82 percent (180,000)

#### **• Oil furnace:** 82 percent (120,000)

#### **• Oil boiler:** 83 percent (125,000)

### **Existing**

#### **• Natural gas:** 78 percent

#### **• Natural gas boiler:**

80 percent

#### **• Oil furnace:** 78 percent

#### **• Oil boiler:** 80 percent

A coalition of business and environmental groups criticized new energy efficiency standards for residential furnaces and boilers released this week, saying most new furnaces on the market already meet the mark.

The U.S. Department of Energy increased the efficiency standard for new gas furnaces, which make up the majority of U.S. sales, from 78 percent to 80 percent. Oil furnace standards were increased from 78 percent to 82 percent. The percentage represents a unit's efficiency in converting fuel into heat.

The new standards, the first update since 1987, would take effect in 2015.

But efficiency advocates said the standards already are met by nearly all of the 3.2 million gas furnaces sold every year.

The groups wanted a 90 percent efficiency standard, which about a third of new gas furnaces already meet.

"DOE has delivered a turkey of an efficiency rule," Andrew deLaski, executive director of the Appliance Standards Awareness Project, said in a statement. His group joined others including the National Resource Defense Council, the American Public Power Association and Edison Electric Institute in criticizing the new standards.

The Energy Department said the new standard would reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 7.8 million tons, about the amount of emissions produced by 2.6 percent of all light trucks on U.S. roads in one year.

But the energy efficiency groups said the 90 percent standard would have cut 17 times more CO<sub>2</sub> and saved a typical consumer about 11 percent off home heating bills relative to the existing standard.

The American Gas Association, a group that represents natural gas utilities, praised the new rules, however, saying higher standards would have penalized people living in warmer climates.

"This rule underscores DOE's understanding that consumers who live in warmer climates should not have to pay the additional costs for central heating equipment that, in the long run, will not pay for itself through energy-efficient savings," said Charles Fritts, the association's vice president of government relations, in a prepared statement.

Fritts argued the higher costs for more efficient systems would have made some consumers forgo new units and instead face the "unwanted and unsafe consequence" of repairing existing systems.

Efficiency groups had suggested different standards for different geographic regions, with tougher requirements in colder parts of the country.

But the Energy Department said previously it has no authority to issue regional standards. Energy legislation that Congress is now considering would specifically allow that, however.

"The right furnace standard for Anchorage may not be the right one for Albuquerque," said Steve Nadel, executive director of the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, in a statement. "Fortunately, Congress is ready to make sure DOE considers regional standards the next time it revises air conditioning or heating standards."

[tom.fowler@chron.com](mailto:tom.fowler@chron.com)